The view of the police on community policing in Belgian multicultural neighbourhoods

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1 Context and research focus

As part of Belgium's police reforms, which were consolidated by the Law of 7 December 1998, the government opted to introduce Community (Oriented) Policing (COP) as the official policing model. It was meant to be the cultural reorganisation of the Belgian police based on five pillars: service orientation, partnership, empowerment, problem-solving and accountability[1]. It was only to be expected that the implementation of this model would be far from straightforward and would give rise to all kinds of issues and difficulties. Despite the fact that the COP model is historically rooted in a number of ethnically-coloured conflicts, the most pressing question was that of how this model might be applied in multicultural neighbourhoods with extremely complex and diverse social contexts in Belgium. Earlier studies show that both police officers and members of ethnic minorities are of the opinion that relations between them are frequently problematic and marked by distancing and mistrust (further elaborated on in 2.). These relationships have become strained as the result of problematic mutual perceptions, ascribed meanings, visions and expectations. Factors such as these, combined with structural neighbourhood factors (discrimination and a heterogeneous social and ethnic mix), are a severe hindrance to the implementation of COP, but further obstacles are encountered in the intrinsic ambiguities wrapped up in the COP model itself as regards the meaning to be attached to "the community". It is for example not at all clear what "the" community means.

In order to, on the one hand, investigate the "transition" to COP in multicultural neighbourhoods, and on the other, to support it in the future, it is essential to gain an understanding of day-to-day practices, of how interactions between the police and ethnic minorities take shape and break down. The present study aims to come to grips with these factors and processes by *examining the extent to which COP takes shape (or not) in multicultural neighbourhoods and through contact with ethnic minorities, and how both parties feel about this.* This type of police study is related to what is often described as police sociology, which gives a picture of how policing actually takes shape in the social process between police officers and citizens and between the officers themselves (van der Torre, 1998).

[1] Steered by Ministerial Circular CP1 27/05/03.

The present study uses the theoretical perspective of social constructionism. In studying social problems, social constructionism steps back and looks at *who* calls 'something' a (social) problem and *how* they define (and explain) this problem (Burr, 2003; Clarke, 2006). In other words, it puts the emphasis on meanings and ascribed meanings. This is because meanings, visions and perceptions make "sense" of a subject and lend structure to its reality. They build up a social reality which is continually (re)produced through social interaction. There is also the question of to what extent an (internal) representation or discourse, being a reflection of how the actors construct "their own" reality, actually manifests itself in practice and whether or not it affects social (inter)action. The central question in the present study is that of how (and why) police officers build up their view of the world and people ("the community" included) and categorise and label on the basis of these constructions (Van Maanen, 1978). To what extent (and why) do they reason in terms of "limits" of "feasibility" or workability and how meaning attribution affects social action (Swidler, 1986) (in this case, policing) and thus the implementation of a policy (in this case, community oriented policing) (Boussard, Loriol & Caroly, 2006).

This starting point is also reflected in the following three core objectives of the present study.

1. Examine whether or not and how the Belgian COP model takes shape in interactions with ethnic minorities in the framework of handling routine tasks and incidents [reality].
2. Examine how ethnic minorities perceive/experience interactions with the police in the framework of their handling of routine tasks and incidents, what their expectations are in this area and examine how congruent these expectations are with key points in the Belgian COP model [perception of immigrants].
3. Examine the extent to which police officers working in the field see the Belgian COP model as applicable in their interactions with ethnic minorities when handling routine tasks and incidents, the problems and possibilities they perceive and their expectations in this area [perception of the police].

The focus in this article lies on the analysis of the perceptions, views and behaviour of street cops on the beat and during interventions.

An understanding of this matter provides fixing points from which to support the application of a Belgian interpretation of community (oriented) policing and provides added value for policymakers - and other authorities - wishing to help the police develop in line with this philosophy (see 5. support for decision-making).

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2 Relationship to (inter)national research

To position the current study in relation to (inter)national research, roughly two main research lines can be referred to. The first relevant line of research concerns (reciprocal) perceptions and images between police and ethnic minorities. The second line refers to research on the implementation of COP (in multicultural neighbourhoods).

Foreign and (limited) Belgian research focussing on the relationship between the police and ethnic minorities, indicate a tense relationship and complicated interactions (Bowling, Phillips & Shah, 2003; Casman, Gailly, Gavray, Kellens & Lamaître, 1992; Haen Marshall, 1997). These studies often point out that the cause of a difficult relationship originates in conflicting cultural backgrounds and a mutual construction of negative images, which often lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. Concerning ethnic minorities, this is frequently connected to (perceived) racism (Casman et al, 1992; Brunson & Miller, 2006; Goodey, 2006) and to social vulnerability and exclusion (Sun, Payne & Wu, 2008). Studies suggested this may lead to the development of a 'vindictive subculture', which is also directed towards the police (as 'delegates' of the Belgian government) (Hebberecht, 1995; Bekkour, 2001). On the other hand, negative images the police embrace of ethnic minorities are often linked to a belief in the validity of crime figures and to the frequency of negative confrontations, which lead to stereotyping processes and to an inadequate knowledge of ethnic communities (Casman e.a., 1992; Feys, 2002; Hebberecht, 1995; van San & Leerkens, 2001; Walgrave, 2002). The bulk of the research is, however, usually fragmented, in a sense that it focuses on particular elements of this relationship (e.g., institutional racism, see Lea, 2004) or treats it merely as a secondary subject, e.g. not making it the focus of research in any way (see Van San & Leerkens, 2001; Vercaigne, Mistiaen, Walgrave & Kesteloot, 2000).

In Belgium, the research focus is generally characterised by successive narrowing. First of all, mainly ethnic minorities, entering Belgium during the first and second wave of migration wave, have been researched. The third -post industrial- wave of migration has been the focus of much less attention,

[2] It was carried out by two researchers (Chaim Demarée & Natascha Vandevoorde) at the University College of Ghent and supported by a team consisting of Lodewijk Gunther Moor (expert & former director linked to the Dutch Society, Security and Police Foundation) and five promoters (Prof. Els Enhus, Free University Brussels, Prof. Frank Hutsebaut, Catholique University Louvain, Prof. Henk Elffers, Free University Amsterdam, Prof. Paul Ponsaers, University Ghent & Prof. Marleen Easton, University College Ghent).

although a recent catch-up trend can be discerned (Feys, 2002). Secondly, within the first and second wave of migration, it is often Moroccan and Turkish immigrants who are the subjects of research. Thirdly, within these groups the research focus narrows even more by focusing on youngsters and especially young men (Feys, 2002). Consequently, there is a lack of research on *other* segments of the immigrant population. Research on the so-called 'new immigrants' (third migration wave) and other ethnic minorities is much less prevalent. Similar research patterns can be noticed in other European countries characterized by equivalent immigration history (Bowling, Phillips & Shah, 2003). As a result the global picture remains quite patchy.

Concerning the second line of research, (Belgian) studies about community policing usually examine implementation of a COP model in police force(s) and focus on problems and obstacles encountered (by interviewing senior and rank-and-file officers, doing observations and analyzing documents) (Vandevenne, 2006; Vandevoorde, Vaerewyck, Enhus & Ponsaers, 2003). This kind of research does not explicitly focus on multicultural neighborhoods, although research results can provide insight with regards to our current study. However, this means research focusing on the (Belgian) implementation of COP is quite limited. In other (especially Anglo-Saxon) countries (where COP originated), a research tradition focusing on the implementation of this model does exist (see for example Eck & Rosenbaum, 1994; Mastrofski, 1998; Sparrow, 1988). Those studies, however, are not always relevant or useful to the Belgian police context and the way COP was conceptualized in our country.

In sum, *empirical* studies to date have barely touched the relationship between the police and ethnic minorities, in Belgium or abroad. Moreover, limited research has taken community (oriented) policing as its starting point, which underpins the originality of this study. On the subject of the implementation of COP in relation to multicultural neighbourhoods, no Belgian research has been done whatsoever, meaning that this study attempts to explore unknown research 'territory'. The research design is located at the crossing of the two research lines mentioned above and aims to integrate under-researched elements in previous research. For example, the third wave of migration is taken into account. Moreover, expectations, possibilities and problems concerning COP are not only examined through a police perspective, but from the perspective of ethnic minorities also. This research reflects an interest in what COP means to those working in 'the field' (police) and to those who 'receive' it (the population, e.g. ethnic minorities).

In the following section, the methodology of the current study is illustrated in detail.

3 Methodology

Given that empirical research on community (oriented) policing in multicultural neighbourhoods is rare, in Belgium and elsewhere, the option for qualitative research methods has been taken (semi-structured interviews with accompanying "on the spot" observations and conclusive round table talks). Where the research objectives are concerned, there are three arguments in favour of this methodology. The first argument rests on the suitability of these methods in order to gain insight into the de facto manifestation of these interactions in reality. The second argument for this choice is that little is known about the exact research context and these methods actually make it possible to explore context in terms of influential factors. The third argument lies in the ability of these methods to give insight into the interplay of meanings and perceptions attached to social phenomena by the actors (both the police and ethnic minorities) on the one hand, and insight into policing practices on the other (Swanborn, 2004; Wester & Hak, 2003; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2005).

After a preparatory phase (explorative literature study), qualitative studies of five multicultural neighbourhoods, lasting six months, were carried out in five Belgian police zones. Besides an even spread over Belgian soil and cooperation from the top ranks of the force; the main intrinsic criteria for selecting the multicultural neighbourhoods in the police zones were the degree of urbanisation and the diversity of the ethnic minorities' residential histories (see diagram 1). The diversity of the ethnic minorities' residential histories is linked to the three migration waves mentioned earlier. In these terms diversity is an important point of departure in this study.

History Migration	Brussels	Flanders	Walloon Provinces
Short History	**LPF1** Urbanization: Type 2 Cooperation Chief of Police?	**LPF2** Urbanization: Type 1 Cooperation Chief of Police?	**LPF3** Urbanization: Type 1 Cooperation Chief of Police?
Long History	**LPF 1** Urbanization: Type 2 Cooperation Chief of Police?	**LPF4** Urbanization: Type 2 Cooperation Chief of Police?	**LPF5** Urbanization: Type 2 Cooperation Chief of Police?

Diagram 1: The selection of five Local Police Forces (LPF).

A context analysis of each police zone facilitated the selection of (representatives from) the immigrant community (37 in total) for the semi-structured interviews and with this, an entrance was made to the research field. Semi-structured interviews (24 in total) with police officers from the selected police zone were held prior to the "on the spot" observation period (182 days in total). The fieldwork in the five multicultural neighbourhoods was brought to a conclusion with two round table talks (one in each part of the country) in which the research results and policy recommendations were put before hands-on

experts from immigrant and police milieus for refinement. For a schematic overview of the methodology see Diagram 2 below.

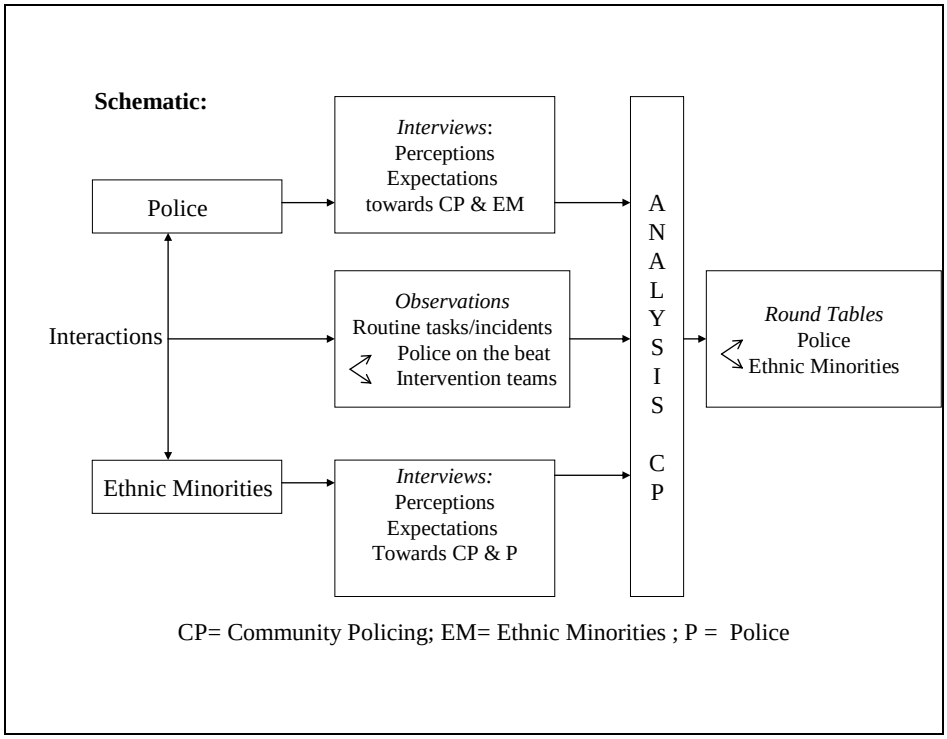


Diagram 2: Overview of the methodology.

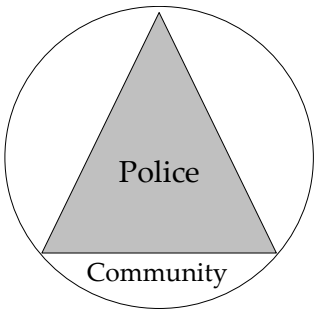
During the fieldwork in the second Flemish police zone the illness of one of the researchers prevented the completion of the planned observations and interviews on the spot and this case study has not been fully executed. The results from this case study have been critically assessed in the light of the overall research results and no anomalies have been detected. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that this study relies on four and a half case studies instead of five.

In what follows the reseach results reflect the analysis of the perceptions, views and behaviour of street cops on the beat and on interventions in the four and a half case studies mentioned above. The focus lies on the conclusion of this analysis and not on illustrations of the actual wording of our interviews with police officers and the variant encounters between the police and minority groups in the selected multicultural neighbourhoods.

4 Research Results

In essence this research is about perceptions, or in other words, the views

Figure 1: Visual representation of COP – Optimal relationship of police / community



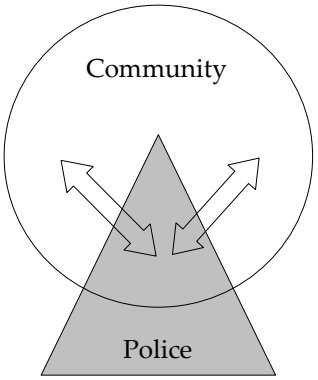
which citizens and the police have of each other and the way in which these come about, in relation to Community (Oriented) Policing (COP). Advocates of COP argue in favour of a police force with a presence in the community. In other words, in this way of thinking, the police, on the one hand, construct their perception of the community on the basis of what happens across society as a whole, and the community, on the other, constructs its perception of the police on the basis of what happens in the police force as a whole (see figure 1). Or to put it another way: they are the mirrors through which people observe reality, or better yet: the degree to which these mirrors are not distorted by an overly reduced or fragmentary perception. Of course the COP aspiration provides a sort of idealised picture which might never be approached or realised in an optimal way, i.e., a non-distorted perception. Nonetheless, is it a strong picture, because it tells us that, in this situation, mutual perceptions rest on adequate and balanced detailed information from both realities.

4.1 "Over and underpolicing" of groups, not neighbourhoods

The research distinctly reveals that the police regularly come into contact with only parts of the community, certainly in the so-called "problematic neighbourhoods".

These groups of individuals in the neighbourhood community, the so-called "regular customers", are subject to "overpolicing" (also referred to in the literature by the term "police property") (Reiner, 1994). On the other hand, a neighbourhood community contains groups with which the police hardly, if ever, come into contact, or, to put it another way, who they don't actually know or know well. Here the term "underpolicing" is used de facto (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Visual representation of COP – Poor relationship of police / community



The study focuses on neighbourhoods with a heterogeneous demographic composition. This was one of the starting points when selecting the observation sites. From this study, it is obvious that both sorts of groups (subject to "overpolicing" and "underpolicing") are present in precisely the same geographical location. In other words, it is not a geographical characteristic in these neighbourhoods, but a group characteristic. Or, to put it more clearly: it is not the police perception of so-called "problematic neighbourhoods", but the perception of so-called "problematic groups" in heterogeneously composed neighbourhoods.

The dividing line cannot simply be drawn in terms of ethnicity:the interplay of different factors have to be faced and these will be covered in logical order below. The research tells us that the line of separation between both groups does not run clearly between immigrant groups on the one hand, and non-immigrant groups on the other. In these problematic neighbourhoods, there are ethnic minorities and individuals who are subject to "overpolicing" while other ethnic minorities and individuals are more "underpoliced". In the same way, there are also ethnic minorities in the same neighbourhoods who are "overpoliced", while other non-immigrants are faced with "underpolicing".

It is obvious that the neighbourhood community as advocated in the vision of COP does not exist for police officers on the beat[3]. They experience the conceptual vagueness of a notion like "community" on a daily basis. The perception of policemen tends to suggest the existence of an extremely fragmented social patchwork of origins, behavioural patterns, preferences, statuses, "cultures" and ages. In brief, they experience multiple neighbourhood communities.

Conclusion: the police come into contact with only a (small) part of the community. Or to put it another way: the building blocks of experience from which policemen construct perceptions of the community is fragmentary, and, not only that, but the perception is selectively created.

4.2 "Overpolicing" of regular (tough) customers

This study reveals that "overpolicing" applies to only a small minority of groups and individuals in neighbourhood communities. It is with these groups that the police experience a feeling of proximity (which does not imply "mental" proximity: on the contrary). At times the police encounter these "regular customers" as victims and at others as offenders. The boundary between both roles appears extremely vague. These are "regular customers" who "involve a lot of work" for the police, who repeatedly call on police services and interventions ("trifling" or "cat-in-the-tree" interventions), or who make the police feel obliged to watch out for them on their own initiative. On some occasions, the police intervention is of a repressive kind; on others, it is of the servicing or caring kind. What is also striking is that these groups have little or no care facilities of their own and that their ability to cope independently is extremely limited. In other words, these are groups who do not have solid social networks to rely on. The result is that they only have the police to call on, for this is the only authority with which they are familiar when problems arise. Work is always inconvenient and the police quickly come to see these "regular customers" as "tough customers". It is therefore only logical that the police construct strong, distinct perceptions of these groups.

[3] The term "police officer" here refers to the profession of policeman in the sociological meaning of the word and not to the rank of "officer" in the force.

Significant groups of these "regular (tough) customers" can be found in economically weak sectors of the neighbourhood community, who have ended up in a rather marginal situation with little in the way of social capital, low schooling, with their own lifestyles, limited verbal skills and knowledge of the official language, little home stability, of a particular age group, perhaps with a criminal past, etc. and, now and then, a particular ethnicity[4]. Policemen who regularly come into contact with these groups ascribe them with specific attributes, such as certain irritating attitudes and specific characteristics (including outward characteristics). Before arriving on the scene again, policemen have perceptions and patterns of expectations about the situation they will encounter and about the behaviour they are likely to face.

The police assess these "regular (tough) customers" and classify them in their own categories, for which they create strong perceptions. The boundaries of these categories sometimes coincide with ethnicity, but just as much with other characteristics, such as age, lack of parental control, gender aspects, marginality, immigration status, etc. Therefore, police categories are certainly not constructed solely on the basis of ethnicity, although at some moments, ethnicity can actually be of importance in the construction of some specific categories (e.g., Moroccan youths).

Some of these "police property" groups are given nicknames, e.g., "drunks" (schelen), "petty crooks" (groseilles), as well as "jerks" (kaks), "tramps" (carapilsiens) and "amoebas" (eencelligen), etc. The police create their own meaningful categories on the basis of hands-on experience. Policemen are expressing complex social phenomena with these nicknames.[5]. This is functional, because the terms are meaningful within the police subculture and allow for internal communication. Outside the police organisation, however, these terms lose their meaning or relevance to a great extent. For policemen, developing a vocabulary of this type is a means of quickly identifying specific groups in a detailed and refined way. This practice is highly locally embedded and diverse, but only inter-subjective if the full richness of this local language is understood. The police identify "fault lines" and differentiate between groups with these

[4] It is also notable that precisely this set of risk characteristics is very similar to that observed among other actors in the administration of criminal justice. Other research (Beyens, 2000) also shows that magistrates and judges use these extra-legal perceptions as a basis for their decisions in their daily practices. They use a similar set of ascribed characteristics to allow them to judge the chances of social integration or the risk of non-integration. Among magistrates, this often involves similar, pure perception, which does not rest on systematic observation, but on more anecdotal hands-on knowledge. We should stress here that this does not in any way amount to forms of so-called "discrimination", but a judgement on the chances of integration which has little substantiation. However, this observation is not unimportant. In this sense, the perceptions of the police do not essentially differ from those of other actors from the echelons of the criminal justice system, and the perceptions that do exist are confirmed in the minds of the servants of criminal justice.

[5] We will make no statement as to whether these categorisations should be seen as discriminating. Any form of categorisation can be discriminating. In the first instance, we note here that the categorisations do not follow ethnic lines and in this sense are not designed to discriminate on the basis of ethnicity.

nicknames. The observations on this matter again clearly reveal that policemen do not see the (multicultural) neighbourhood and its residents as a single community, nor do they treat it as a single community.

As mentioned earlier, the *"overpolicing"* of certain groups in the community creates a situation in which the police construct perceptions which are extremely specific and selective. This does not mean that these perceptions have come from thin air or that they are not based on "hands-on" experience. The police have a fairly adequate, intricate and realistic picture of these so-called "property" groups. This is because it rests on knowledge beyond the common knowledge in society. It is precisely through repeated and daily confrontation and intervention, through the frequent grinding down of perceptions, that perceptions become more tangible and categories are created. The police are perhaps the only actors in society to have such regular dealings with extremely problematic groups in neighbourhood communities.

If these interactions are not meaningful, it is not because policemen interact with only a part of the neighbourhood community. In the field, policemen come into contact with these problematic groups willingly or otherwise and have a very broad arsenal of practices, varying from a continuum of social-preventive to purely repressive means, to deal with this (something elaborated on later in more detail). As far as they are concerned, one thing is clear: they will have to make choices and take action. Some of these practices can be seen as useful and effective by the hierarchy, others not. The point is that these practices are largely unknown to the hierarchy and are barely, if at all, discussed in the force (or beyond), and therefore, scarcely valorised.

Police cynicism is growing in the minds of policemen as a result, and frustration and professional isolation are on the rise. Policemen on the beat and investigating officers try to clarify where the problems lie, but the force does not pay enough attention to what they have to say (or so they feel). As a result, the internal police subculture mentioned above arises, in effect a police vocabulary, which is difficult, if not impossible, to communicate within the force or to the outside world. This phenomenon is reinforced when policemen on the beat are faced with problematic realities, which can in fact only be solved by other actors (emergency services, social sectors, youth protection, etc.). Often, however, policemen on the beat can only observe that the desired solution does not materialise. The result is an increase in feelings of powerlessness and/or frustration. Policemen, and certainly policemen on the beat, who bring these problems home after work know these problems only too well, but feel powerless to remedy their causes. They are left with the overwhelming feeling of "fighting a losing battle".

Many aspects of police organisation contribute to this growing feeling of powerlessness. Understaffing, bigger beats, the "hurried idea" of intervention teams, the paperwork involved in running the district and the fact that countless

officers, in the metropolitan fabric in particular, are not sufficiently familiar with the local context, undoubtedly play an added role. A great many policemen feel left out in the cold because they operate in a context in which the broader care professions do little, in which they perceive the judicial system as "too lax" with their attempts at corrective action, and because they are faced with a population that is at times very anti-authoritarian. In some cases, this leads to *a policy of pseudo-tolerance*.

There is also a growing feeling of not being listened to or understood. Much more so than in the past, it is recommended that the available hands-on knowledge of the police be systematised and put to use. Indeed, dismissing this hands-on knowledge as pure stereotyping would be all too easy. Policemen on the beat have a right to speak when it comes to groups they know well and from close quarters. Should police cynicism increase without any form of dialogue, the gulf between the police and the community will grow and this is precisely what should be countered in a COP vision, i.e., the feeling of "us" and "them".

4.3 "Underpolicing" and neglect

On the other hand, some groups in neighbourhood communities are little-known to the police. One of the most striking observations of this study is that, where opinions on desired police conduct are concerned, there are no significant differences between problematic and less problematic groups in the neighbourhood, between well-known or little-known communities, or between immigrants and non-immigrants residents. Just about everyone wants a pleasant and helpful police force. Everyone thinks that the police should be present, reachable, available, familiar with the problems (however, small) and consulted.

This contrasts starkly with the view held by less problematic groups in neighbourhood communities on the necessary policing of … "others". These others are in need of law and order, i.e., repressive attention from the police, or so this study shows. This observation ties in with Lerner's theory on The belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1980). It seems that residents in neighbourhoods and districts always see "others" as the cause of the problem. No one counts himself among the others. Problems occur in certain districts of a city, in certain streets of a district and in certain houses of a street. Residents seek constant confirmation that they are good and that others are not. The same mechanisms are at play between non-immigrants and immigrants residents. There are remarkable similarities between immigrants and non-immigrants residents' perceptions of policing.

(1) Some of the less well known groups (faced with "underpolicing") tend to be unproblematic. "Underpolicing" means that the police do not come into sufficient contact with the majority of less problematic groups, which are able to cope independently in the neighbourhood community. Many of the positive neighbourhood and district dynamics pass the policeman on the beat and the

investigating officer by. Policemen do not see it as their job to get to know these dynamics in more detail. As a result, large areas of community life are unknown to policemen and they are in danger of making an exception the rule. They are not familiar enough with the positive forces emanating from large groups in the neighbourhood community thereby strong perceptions of small problematic groups are insufficiently corrected and are in danger of becoming too generalised. The antidote for police cynicism is present in problematic neighbourhoods and districts, but it is not sufficiently used, so that again, the gulf between the police and the neighbourhood community grows.

(2) Besides these more unproblematic groups, there are also neighbourhood communities, certainly in the neighbourhoods investigated in this study, which are confronted with countless societal problems and can certainly therefore be considered as socially problematic from this standpoint. The police cannot really assess or can only guess at these groups' activities and the problems or conflicts that exist. This category of groups is in some sense less well defined and much vaguer. For that matter, these groups are not infrequently cast in the role of victim. These groups rarely turn to the police when problems arise and often resort to their own mechanisms to find solutions and cope for themselves. The perception is growing in these neighbourhood communities that they are the subject of police neglect and under-protection. The police do have some perceptions of these groups, but they tend to be vague and not particularly explicit. It should be stressed once again that these groups are made up of both immigrants and non-immigrants. Let's take a closer look at this.

(2a) The first unknown group is that of travellers, mobile groups of people. These are groups who stay in multicultural neighbourhoods for only a short time (e.g., people passing through, asylum seekers, people without papers, newcomers who return home, gypsies and students). One of the characteristics typical of the multicultural neighbourhood is a high turnover of population. It is because of this high turnover that policemen are not able to gain a clear picture of these groups or assess their expectation patterns, let alone develop a relationship with them. In practice, what infrequent contact there is with these groups is usually confined to district activities, such as administrative procedures when they first register as residents. In other words, the police have neither the opportunity nor the time (nor even the capacity) to get to know them.

(2b) The police have a rather stereotypical perception of other unknown groups in multicultural neighbourhoods, which differs little or not at all from the dominant perceptions in society. Lack of knowledge and tangibility or a feeling of social distance on the part of the police seems to stimulate the use of clichéd perceptions, which can quickly become associated with certain criminal or troublemaking profiles. Thus, for example, policemen on the beat are relatively quick to associate Eastern Europeans with "heavy weapons" (due to an alleged "history of war") and Gypsies are always "thieves" and "tinkers". However, these perceptions are not particularly based on experience and

policemen on the beat copy them almost seamlessly from broader social perceptions. The observation that perceptions of known groups ("overpolicing") and unknown groups ("underpolicing") are intertwined tends to convince policemen that the latter are equally grounded in reality and experience.

(2c) There are also groups that have lived in the multicultural neighbourhood for some time, often for several generations. These are so-called sedentary groups, who have developed a preference for "managing their own affairs" and orientate towards social networks in their "own" (ethnic) group. Among those worthy of mentioning here are the Belgian Turks and Pakistanis. In practice, policemen observe that these groups rarely turn to the police force for help because they would rather settle their own conflicts than involve the police. Few complaints are received from these population groups and they are not particularly willing to report themselves as the victims of crime. Policemen on the beat find it very difficult to obtain information (e.g., concerning a request from the tribunal for further investigation). Despite physical proximity and even the impression of good relations and an attitude of respect from members of this community, the police often have a sense of distance and lack of tangibility. These are thresholds which police officers sense, and which prevent them from assessing what is "really" going on in these communities, the perception they have of the police, exactly what the community expects and the activities in which they are engaged. These observations may well relate to the cultural preferences of certain ethnic sections of the community. Nonetheless, they are also relevant in the framework of a COP policy. Indeed, they illustrate significant problems in the area of partnership, working to solve problems and effective external orientation.

Two points can be made, however, in relation to the observations above.

(1) The police have identified these obstacles in order to gain a better knowledge of large sections of the population. However, only very rarely does this relate explicitly to COP. Policemen tend to attach the most importance to cultural aspects, if in their eyes, these are of relevance to interactions in the field. In particular, policemen stress the things that come across as derogatory to police officers (misunderstandings, misinterpretations, language problems or attitudes). Although the police representation often stresses these "cultural differences" (depending on the zone), this study shows that they occur less frequently than the (internal) representation would lead us to believe, and that more subtle cultural preferences are of significance, i.e., the notion of "closed communities" and the frequently-stated preference for "managing one's own affairs".

(2) A second matter, which relates to repeated reports from officers of the distancing they experience with certain ethnic minorities, is that this appears diagonally opposed to the tenor of the talks which were held with countless members of these communities wherein demand for closer contact (albeit in a

neutral context) is one of the most salient expectations from the police. These are the groups who want to see tougher and firmer policing of troublemaking, which they often ascribe to other parties.

4.4 Two sides of the same coin

This study makes it apparent that overpolicing and underpolicing are two sides of the same coin. The police can devote extra attention to certain groups of "regular customers" who they know to be repeated offenders or troublemakers in a neighbourhood or district. But it is precisely this extra attention to fellow residents which can lead to other residents in the neighbourhood being neglected. The police appear unconcerned about the latter residents - they are out in the cold as it were. In other words, this gives rise to the perception that extra attention paid to one leads to indifference about the other.

Examining the diversity of communities in one and the same multicultural neighbourhood, more groups face "underpolicing" today than "overpolicing". In line with foreign research (Crowther, 2004), some groups of citizens in multicultural neighbourhoods are crying out, as it were, for more attention. This is a form of "underpolicing", which is moving towards an evasive, reactive style in respect of these neighbourhoods, but which certainly cannot be ascribed to police perceptions of the neighbourhood and its residents.

These two idealised types of police perception of the population can often be placed on a continuum, i.e., with well-known communities at one end and lesser-known communities at the other.

In the case of known "regular customers", the research shows that the police make choices between several representations and practices or modes of action. There is a palette of representations and practices from which the policeman can choose and use, depending on the situation. These can be social, organisational or even individual in nature. Throughout this study it became clear that, in practice, more choices are open (within the arsenal of available practices) when it comes to the better known groups. To a certain point, modes of action and practices are found to be in line.

It is this palette which is missing for groups in which tangibility is low and clichéd representations set the tone, where insufficient knowledge of the context exists and the stereotypical impressions formed by colleagues are seldom corrected. At such points, policemen fall back on a one-dimensional discourse of consensus, which is not infrequently repressive in nature. Where this involves lesser-known groups, it appears that police perceptions all too quickly tend towards the pessimistic, the distrustful and sometimes even the dominantly negative. Again, this mechanism does not seem to relate to "immigrants" or "non-immigrants".. This perception is expressed clearly in the internal representation, in the form of statements which leave little to the imagination.

What is also notable is that these discourses do not necessarily translate into practice, in the field or during interaction with the population groups in question. The conclusion must therefore be that there is not necessarily, in this case, a direct link between the representation on the one hand, and conduct in the workplace on the other.

4.5 Aversion to the COP discourse, yet still acting in accordance with it

The detailed categorisation of specific groups and the subculture that ensues from this relates to the way in which policemen try to resist attempts to drastically change police culture through policy. While close contact, cooperation and a service-minded set up are the main policy task objectives, it seems that the priorities of policemen lie elsewhere. This is because policemen at the grass roots level, as well as those in the middle ranks, are not particularly sympathetic towards this way of doing things, which they feel is imposed from above. This research shows that investigating officers in particular, and to a lesser extent, policemen on the beat, excel in disregarding, belittling and even ridiculing the COP philosophy.

The approach is seen as neither applicable nor expedient due to the (multicultural and metropolitan) context. Their officers see a COP policy as being (too) "soft". In terms of knowledge, many inspectors never progress further than blindly copying out a few COP principles. Only a minority recognise its usefulness and manage to apply the overall concept of the philosophy to their own role or the police force as a whole. Policemen find COP "too abstract" and, as they say themselves, they find it difficult to see its relevance. The ultimate argument is often that COP "won't work here". The impression is that COP policy implementation is not driven from the bottom up, but is a "managerial" top-down approach and foreign to "real" policing [6].

Nevertheless, this is a strange observation given that the findings of this research suggest that the approach taken on the shop floor does in fact contain many COP elements. Depending on population group or context, policemen (can) use all kinds of approaches and strategies in line with the detailed knowledge they have of specific societal problems, individuals, groups, neighbourhoods and even social networks. It is notable that some policemen on the beat appear to be extremely proficient in this area. Practices being used by these policemen, allowed them to make the problems they face workable and controllable, albeit the proverbial bandage on a wooden leg. In some sense, these are "COP-real practices" because they are faced with these phenomena and no other authorities are deeply concerned with them. To keep this reality controllable or workable to some extent, the police develop their own specific

[6] This is a remarkable observation in itself, given that COP is all about trying to prevent a top-down approach.

ways of dealing with things, characterised by mediation, consultation, conciliation (i.e., focusing on de-escalation), as well as monitoring, and if necessary, taking a "hard" approach when there is no better alternative.

Not only does this research suggest that the police approach already contains COP elements, but that, because of the varied approaches and strategies that make the categorisation mechanism a central theme, there can even be talk of *multiple* COP practices.

Given the suggestion of a COP approach (albeit to a small extent) and that there are variations in approaches, based on communities, police resistance to COP policy remains truly astonishing, and this resistance is not adequately explained by a lack of knowledge of COP. Policemen may well see COP as part of the so-called "external" world, which *in their eyes* has little or no connection with substantial "actual policing realities in the field". COP has no place in the world in the way that policemen perceive and structure it themselves. The philosophy comes across as a *corpus alienum* and appears incompatible with the unique way in which policemen perceive, (re)construe and, as they say themselves, are forced to deal with the context of work. COP is perceived as something "foreign", something imposed by an "external world", and this creates strong resistance.

4.6 Relationship between internal representation and approach

What are the factors that cause so-called overpolicing or underpolicing? What is the relationship between perception, internal reasoning and approach in the field? The inductive factors identified here sketch out the more complex reality. Here it concerns general context factors such as types of formal control to do with racism, migration history and degree of ethnic density to an abstract level.

(1) The first factor relates to the tendency of policemen on the beat to *set priorities* themselves, more or less independent of implemented policy. These policemen prioritise much more on the basis of perceived and experienced realities in the workplace (in terms of criminality, troublemaking and neighbourhood problems). Policemen on the beat construct their own mental "crime profiles", which they relate to specific communities and to which they tailor their own approach. These profiles largely rest on anecdotal hands-on experience and not on systematic analysis. Nor do they bear much relation to policy control. According to Boussard et al. (2006) this tendency reflects that which policemen on the beat consider as "real policing" or "real customers".

Some well-defined minorities, such as Gypsies, suffer directly through this. This is a group of the population from which policemen (want to) experience

mental and physical distancing, and to whom they will even systematically attach a crime profile. It is a group whose negative image always comes through during interactions, regardless of the police officer(s) involved or the specific situation (with the exception of neighbourhood policing).

(2) The second factor follows on from the first. Once again, this involves conflicting priorities for the policeman, as regards what is considered *"real" and "unreal"* policing, and so it can also run contrary to envisaged policy. In this respect, the many curt interactions noted with marginalised non-immigrant population groups can be quoted. In one sense, this behaviour is understandable, since the results of the study suggest that these groups are seen as tough customers, and the police are driven beyond the frustration threshold because of the powerlessness they feel in remedying the causes of the recurring problems. In situations like these, all that usually remains to be done is an attempt to de-escalate.

(3) As third factor, *situational* aspects often influence the tone of an interaction and the approach taken by policemen. It is in the concrete situational context that underlying perceptions or preferences are expressed. This tends to be the case if the situation, and more particularly, the behaviour of the citizen overlap in many areas with the so-called attributes that policemen give to the person or group in question through their categorising system. In other words, when, in the eyes of policemen, the "preconceptions" open to them are confirmed. This finding is extremely consistent and is strongly related to the way in which policemen define their own role and how they interpret the behaviour of the citizen. It is important to stress here the fact that officers are more interested in the respect they expect from citizens due to their position of authority, than the respect they are required to show these citizens.

(4) During interactions with the so-called "property groups", policemen can choose from several aspects of reasoning and approach, depending on the situation. For example, they can depart from the dominant social reasoning and, thanks to their varied experience, opt for specific strategies or a custom-made approach. It may be tough and controlling, or conciliatory or mediating. It would appear that there is quite a lot of choice. However, these choices appear to be missing in interactions with groups for which only *partial (hands-on) knowledge* is available. At such moments, policemen seem to lose grip of the situation and fall back on a "consensus approach", which leans closely towards underlying but clichéd perceptions and exaggerated criminality profiles.

(5) The fifth factor is the *"cultural and social capital"* of policemen on the beat. This covers all the underlying attitudes, political preferences, knowledge, social skills, as well as experience, knowledge of various social representations and trends, social networks, environments frequented in their private life, etc. In particular, this factor clarifies the precarious relations between policemen and young North Africans. In general, these youths suffer from a (considerably)

negative image. This is reflected in the defeatist reasoning noted among forces in a number of police zones. Relations between the police and these groups cannot be described as anything other than problematic.

Perceptions of North African youths rest on explicit mental crime and troublemaking profiles. We were , however, unable to note any so-called "consensus approach", as opposed to the observations with regard to Gypsy families. On the contrary, during interactions with Moroccan youths, for example, we noted circumspection in the main. In practice (despite the negative image), we even noted a palette of varying "soft" and "hard" approaches or approach strategies, which varied greatly from officer to officer. However, some policemen follow a black & white reasoning. These policemen prefer tougher overtures, regardless of the situation. This type of approach could be observed mainly among policemen who place themselves on the right of the political spectrum and are quicker than their colleagues to criticise multicultural society. They appear less ready to take a mediating line. Other policemen showed a more subtle picture, and one that departed from the at times "hard" reasoning of the force. They were also the ones who took the trouble to put their colleagues' negative statements about policing multicultural neighbourhoods into context. They appear to opt for other forms of action, notably often with success for that matter, and corrected their colleagues' statements or doings, but never in the citizen's presence.

5 Support for decision-making

In relation to the above research results, three clusters of recommendations can be proposed to optimise the implementation of the Belgian COP model in multicultural neighbourhoods.

5.1 Validating knowledge & approaches in the field of known problematic communities

It is recommended that the available hands-on policing knowledge of policemen in the field concerning *known problematic communities*, and the approach taken in relationship to this, be validated.

A significant step towards this would be to systematise (if possible) and record this hands-on knowledge. Not to keep a check on police officers, but to increase the internal learning effect. It would appear that this type of hands-on knowledge does not fit in with the registration and performance measurement systems currently used in the police force. In particular (but not exclusively), the writing up of a police report is easily traceable in the current system, and in this way, it is disproportionately validated as a part of police work. Indeed, it is a long way off the type of hands-on knowledge brought to light in this research

and used to affect the overwhelming majority of police work in (multicultural) neighbourhoods. In other words, more thought must be put into how this hands-on knowledge can be recorded, so that its value can be assessed.

One essential step in the exchange of hands-on knowledge may be found through (horizontal) inter-vision moments in which officers exchange their knowledge, experience, tactics and techniques among themselves (and relevant partners from the integrated safety sector), but above all are able to discuss the dilemmas they experience in the field. This can help demarcate the boundaries between policing and other actors in the safety domain, in relation to mediation, for example. This is also an opportunity for police leaders to recognise their people's freedom to implement policy in the field and to give these people room to consider a responsible way of responding to this freedom in the field. This process can generate an understanding of the degree to which it may or may not be possible to formulate separate choices relating the discretionary powers accorded police officers in the (multicultural) field. In addition to inter-vision moments, coaching can be used to focus greater attention on the validation of hands-on police knowledge on the work floor. The final goal would be to contribute towards forms of "smart" policing.

Additionally, the learning effect of both recommendations can be converted into a learning process, assuming that hands-on knowledge finds a place in the method of assessing and remunerating the work of policemen. Rewarding creativity in dealing with complex problems in (multicultural) neighbourhoods can be an "incentive" of great importance in revaluing neighbourhood policing, in relation to officers and investigating officers alike. An important note in the margin here is that the method of remuneration should not be such that officers are taken away from the neighbourhoods. An upgrade in the police service often implies more office work, and this should not the case when it comes to developing COP.

Finally, it should be said that these recommendations stand or fall in relation to the structural and statutory context in which they are implemented. This is because a great many standards and statutes have been introduced since the police reforms of 1998 and these do not always allow for the necessary flexibility. What is required is a rethinking of these elements to ensure the provision of quality services for the residents of (multicultural) neighbourhoods.

5.2 Facilitating and stimulating knowledge on lesser known (problematic) communities

It is recommended that the available hands-on policing knowledge of policemen in the field concerning *lesser known problematic communities*, and the approach taken in relationship to this, be enlarged, facilitated and positively stimulated. It is apparent from the present study that this is the most

underestimated challenge to modern policing in multicultural neighbourhoods. This is because there are communities of which the police have little or no knowledge, and this is a real void in the framework of COP, given that each of these communities in a democratic constitutional state is entitled to expect an equal service provision.

To address this void, it is important that policemen expand their contacts in (multicultural) neighbourhoods by developing more and systematic contacts, also at the micro-level, with a view to building up trust with members of communities who are not immediately apparent or known. This implies an investment in contacts, whereby the immediate result (let alone effect) in terms of current police performance measurement systems will not be known right away. Thought must be given as to how this work can be valorised with a view to a better social embedding of the police in (multicultural) neighbourhoods.

In building up these contacts, it is recommended that a peep be taken over the "wall" to investigate methodologies from other sectors (such as outreach street work) to provide better services for communities. In turn, this evolution can be positively stimulated by working out "incentives" to facilitate police creativity in this area and, in this way too, contribute to the development of "smart" cops.

Finally, a function-oriented recruitment of policemen in this context can be a useful path for the future. Whereas recruitment is uniform at present, meaning that every recruit can reach similar jobs over time, a form of selectivity when recruiting, and above all during selection, would provide an opportunity to respond more effectively to the personnel requirements relating to COP. Indeed, it is utopian to assume that uniform recruitment according to an amorphous profile will automatically contribute to a larger selection of "smart" cops. Additionally, the various training courses in the police landscape can be screened in terms of COP requirements in order to better organise the objectives set on a "points" basis[7]. The aim is to stimulate a force-wide community-oriented approach and bridge the pitfall of ascribing this to one or more functions within the police organisation (e.g., neighbourhood policing).

5.3 Two-way communication between communities and the police

This study reveals that it is not just the police, but the communities in multicultural neighbourhoods that suffer from distorted, incomplete, fragmentary perceptions of the (local) police. This is something that takes shape in practice through an inadequate flow of knowledge and information, incorrect

[7] PONSAERS, P., Thursday, 16 October 2008 – Egmont Palace, Brussels. International Seminar: Police education and training in Belgium: on the way to Bologna? Organiser: Centre for Police Studies. Lecture: "Conclusions of the seminar".

or unrealistic patterns of expectation and highly generalised impressions of (overly) apparent police practices, while other less apparent practices are barely heard of. For their part, policemen voice difficulties, sometimes even resistance, towards assessing the expectations and wishes of communities, or pride themselves on knowing them "well" in any case. It is therefore recommended that the available *hands-on knowledge of the police in all problematic neighbourhood communities* be further validated.

It is crucial here that the exchange of information between the police and the communities be stimulated to allow for two-directional traffic. All too often, communities are seen merely as "suppliers" of useful information (from an instrumental viewpoint) and less as a party requesting information on exactly what the police do and where the emphasis on safety policy lies. Nonetheless, this implies a challenge in terms of COP, given that the provision of information is an important task in providing a service to communities. The present study also shows that communities usually expect a more proactive attitude from the police. Both parties stand to benefit from a mutual assessment of problems, desires, expectations, rights and duties. Explaining police practices in certain (parts of) neighbourhoods (and their limitations) can help communities to understand the role and function of the police in their society. Informed people can be, for example, more understanding of potential trouble generated in their neighbourhood through certain police action. This is an opportunity for the police to become more embedded in communities with which they generally have little contact, a goal which is clearly congruent with the ideas of COP. Finally, this is the meaning of one of the principles of COP in Belgium, the so-called principle of "empowerment".

When communicating with communities, it is also important to search for the most suitable way of giving concrete shape to the exchange of information. Face-to-face contact is without a doubt an extremely powerful way of meeting this requirement, but at the same time, it implies heavy investment in order to apply some sort of system. It is becoming more important, however, that the police not only work on a so-called "approachability", but (pro)actively succeed in addressing citizens in their face-to-face contacts.

5.4 Reconsidering community policing

Finally, there is a need to reflect on the body of thought enshrined in the concept of COP. The present study shows that, during the talks and interviews, policemen were barely able to reproduce the philosophy or sketch out its implications for the force as a whole. Nonetheless, observations in the field have shown that several police practices do lean towards the COP philosophy. In other words, although the five principles (external orientation, partnership, problem-solving action, justification and empowerment) seldom roll off the tongue, some current practices do illustrate that COP is possible in the (multicultural) arena.

It would be reckless to claim that this is sufficient to assure the success of the democratic process of renewing the Belgian police landscape, which was set in motion with the integrated police act of 1998. This study patently shows the challenges that are still waiting when it comes to effectively implementing COP. If a next step should be taken, it is essential that current police policy take the police practices illustrated in the present study into account.

Therefore the present study can be used as a source of information in the further development of COP in Belgium. The time has come to realise that extra policy documents and guidelines on this subject, such as the "excellent police care" document, barely get through to the policemen in the field. The time is ripe to treat policemen in the field as "practical professionals" and take their hands-on knowledge as a starting point for all further management of the change process. This will give competent police involvement (internal empowerment) a real chance and create leverage for competent neighbourhood resident involvement (external empowerment) (in this case, ethnic minorities in multicultural neighbourhoods). With this recommendation, the present study aims to contribute towards the further democratisation of the Belgian police system.

The police receive a disproportionately high amount of enquiries from some communities and, to a large extent, this affects the time available for and how other communities are treated. This is the day-to-day reality in which policemen in the field operate and in which they are being asked to work in a community-oriented way. The five principles of this philosophy require that police policy pay greater attention to this reality and the available hands-on knowledge. In this way, policemen can be appropriately involved in the performance of their duties in a (multicultural) society.

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